

# Environmental Public Health Tracking

Issue 1, Summer 2004

*Our vision is to protect communities from adverse health effects through the integration of public health and environmental information.*

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**W**ELCOME to the first edition of the Montana **Environmental Public Health Tracking Project (EPHT)** newsletter. This is our first quarterly newsletter. These newsletters will discuss the Montana EPHT project, environmental health concerns, and events of interest. We welcome your input. Please send comments and topic ideas to: [epht@state.mt.us](mailto:epht@state.mt.us).

**E**nvironmental Public Health Tracking (EPHT) is an initiative at Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services funded through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The goals of EPHT are:

- Link existing information on environmental hazards, people's exposure to these hazards, and health effects which may be related. By linking these data, we will be able to inform the public health community and

the environmental quality community to help reduce the risk of environmentally related health effects throughout Montana.

- Disseminate information about environmentally-related health concerns to interested citizens, policy makers and healthcare providers.

A statewide EPHT Advisory Group was formed in April 2003. This group has contributed to the planning of the EPHT project and has met six times to date. Beginning in 2005 a strategic

planning process will be conducted to solidify a plan for implementing EPHT in Montana. Interested parties that want to contribute to this planning effort can email us at: [epht@state.mt.us](mailto:epht@state.mt.us).



For more information, as well as links to related resources, visit our website at <http://www.dphhs.state.mt.us/epht>.

## Gathering Input on Environmental Health Concerns and Needs in Montana

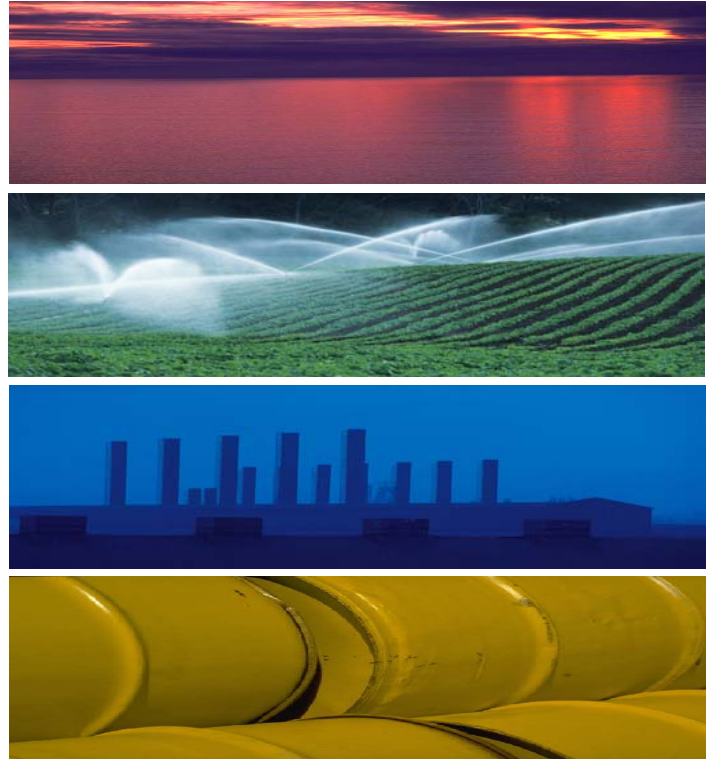
Over the past 12 months, Dr. Wade Hill, of the MSU Bozeman College of Nursing, has been conducting state-wide surveys for the EPHT needs assessment. Public health nurses, sanitarians, health officers, county commissioners, county extension agents, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been surveyed to determine their level of familiarity with and involvement in environmental health issues. The survey seeks to determine gaps and trends in the utilization of environmental health (EH) information at the local level; knowledge and use of EH databases; perceptions of priority EH conditions, exposures, and hazards; and citizen and local provider utilization of local health resources for addressing EH concerns.

Wade developed the survey materials and methods. The survey has been distributed by both paper & pencil and web-based formats, and with the

exception of NGOs, survey implementation has been completed. By mid-August, data entry and descriptive analysis will be completed, with a report being delivered to the EPHT project by September 1.

Overall, response rates have been very good. For public health nurses, sanitarians, public health officers, county commissioners and county extension agents, response rates averaged around 72%. The NGO survey is currently in process and appears to have a lower response rate.

The survey is one of the efforts by the EPHT project to better understand environmental health needs in Montana. Other efforts include examining citizen perceptions and needs through questions added to the Behavior Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS), funding 9 county and 2 tribal community Environmental Health needs assessments, and obtaining input from the EPHT Advisory Group.



*Preliminary results of the survey of Public Health Nurses in Montana found interest in web-based courses on environmentally related diseases.*

*Environmental Health Concerns of nurses include*

- *environmental tobacco smoke in homes with children*
- *drinking water contamination*
- *toxic contaminants in foods*

*Health effects that nurses were most concerned about include*

- *adverse reproductive outcomes*
- *respiratory disease*
- *disease outbreaks associated with food and water contamination*

## Environmental Hazards in Schools



Old and improperly stored science lab chemicals pose a threat to school health nationwide when ignored. Montana DEQ is currently conducting a survey of school principles to assess storage of chemicals in Montana schools. This information will be used to estimate the cost of making schools safer.

<http://www.mdeqschoollabs.com>

## Environmentally Preferable Cleaning Products

A report was released in July 2004 by the National Environmental Trust entitled "Cabinet Confidential: Toxic Products in the Home." The report details everyday toxic chemicals that are in most of our homes and explains potential health effects from these chemicals. We added an area to our EPHT website titled

"Consumer Initiatives" where you can access this report. We also have a link to Newdream.org, a site listing green cleaning products available for institutional cleaning.

<http://www.dphhs.state.mt.us/epht>

<http://www.newdream.org/aboutus/index.html>

## MPHA Conference Focuses on Public Health and the Environment

*September 8-10, 2004, Butte, Montana*

The next Montana Public Health Association Conference will take place September 8-10, in Butte, Montana. The title of the conference is "Nature Calling: Public Health and Your Environment." State Medical Officer and EPHT Principal Investigator, Dr. Michael Spence will be presenting at this conference. Dr. Katherine Shea from Chapel Hill, NC, will speak on Children's Environmental Health issues. Dr. Mark Anderson, director of the EPA Region 8 Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU), will also present on Children's Environmental Health issues. Dr. Jerrold Eichner, Montana's only pediatric pulmonologist, will give an update on childhood asthma. In addition, Marjean Magraw,

EPHT Project Coordinator, and Chris Deveny, Community Assessment Contractor, along with community representatives, will present some findings of the EPHT Community Needs Assessments of 2003-2004.

Mark Anderson is a staff general pediatrician at the Kid's Care Clinic located on the Denver Health Medical Center campus in Denver, Colorado. His clinical activities include pediatrics practice, supervision of eight general pediatrics residents, work in the campus urgent care clinic, and work on the Pediatrics ward and ICU at Denver Health. Dr. Anderson is the director of the Rocky Mountain Region Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU), the Region VIII (EPA) member of the ATSDR/EPA national PEHSU program.

His research interests include environmental precipitants of childhood asthma, access to care and health care disparities, medical education, and effects of environmental tobacco smoke exposure on infants and children.

Katherine M. Shea is a general pediatrician with specialty training in preventative medicine and environmental health. Dr. Shea has served as a research fellow at the National Institute of Environmental Health, as a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics' Committee on Environmental Health, and since 1999 has worked as a consultant to federal regulatory agencies, non-profit environmental organizations, and health organizations including the World Health Organization on pediatric environmental health issues. Her peer-reviewed work includes

publications on pediatric environmental health, irradiation of foods, potential toxicity of phthalate plasticizers, and reproductive toxicology. Currently, Dr. Shea serves as a medical consultant to the Physicians for Social Responsibility National Office, is a technical consultant and scientific editor for the World Health Organization, and works part-time at North Carolina State University Student Health Service as a staff physician. Dr. Shea is an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Division of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Department of Community and Family Medicine at Duke University Medical Center, in Durham, North Carolina.

For registration information contact Laurie Kops at (406) 444-2457

## Update: Environmental Health Community Needs Assessments

*Christine Deveny, EPHT Technical Facilitator*

Last fall Montana EPHT contracted with nine county-based and two tribal-based health departments to conduct Community Environmental Health Assessments. Each contractor was given flexibility in choosing the assessment methodology that best suited their community and that would identify environmental health concerns from a broad cross-section of their population. Some contractors chose to conduct phone surveys, while others

asked citizens to complete written questionnaires and then held face-to-face discussions or focus groups. Several of the contractors have completed their survey work while others are still gathering survey responses. Next steps include organizing, analyzing, and interpreting the data and creating a ranked list of the identified environmental health concerns. Then the contractors will meet with their advisory groups (in many cases their Boards of Health) to discuss and prioritize the concerns for local action. By



*March 2004 Contractor Training, Helena, MT*

the end of September each contractor will document their assessment process, findings,

and recommendations in a final report.





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#### Upcoming Events & Activities

*September 8-10, 2004*

MPHA Conference in Butte, MT,  
"Nature Calling: Public Health and  
Your Environment."

*September 9, 2004*

EPHT Advisory Group meeting,  
Ramada Inn Copper King,  
Butte, MT

*September 2004*

Request for interested MT county  
or tribal health departments to  
participate in new Environmental  
Health Assessments.

*October 7-8, 2004*

EPA Children's Environmental  
Health Summit, Salt Lake City, UT

*November 6-10, 2004*

American Public Health  
Association Conference,  
Washington, DC, "Public Health  
and the Environment."

Physician outreach planned in  
2005 at several sites through grand  
rounds presentations and outline  
presentations.

## Eating Fish: What You Should Know

We often hear confusing messages about what we should and should not eat. One of the confusing food items is fish. The benefits of omega 3 fatty acids suggest that fish is a favorable source of protein. Reports in the news, however, advocate limiting fish consumption due to mercury and PCB contamination in fish. Those of us in EPHT haven't stopped eating fish, but we are informed about the fish we eat, and vary our diet. Fish purchased in the store may have some level of environmental contamination, but the risk is lower based on the type of fish. Know what types of fish are higher risk; large predatory species

such as pike, walleye, swordfish and shark tend to contain higher levels of mercury and PCBs. Note that canned "light" tuna is lower in mercury than other types of tuna.

If you are fishing for your meal, check out the Montana fish advisory information found on our website: <http://www.dphhs.state.mt.us/epht>. Fish from around the state were tested in 1994 for mercury and PCBs by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Department (FWP). Currently, FWP is again testing samples of fish throughout the state. The fish testing results are used to develop the Montana fish advisory. This advisory



recommends safe levels of fish to eat. Pregnant or breastfeeding women and children under the age of 15 are recommended to limit fish consumption to 2 meals per week for even low risk fish caught in Montana.